**Pros and Cons of Getting a Dog**

If you've been thinking about getting a dog at this point in your life, you ought to examine the pros and cons of bringing one into your home. Perhaps you're experiencing an empty nest, recovering from a breakup, or simply looking for something to brighten your days. A dog can be all that, and more. One can also be a handful. Consider the pros and cons below, and determine whether the pitter-patter of paws will be music to your ears:

**Pros of Getting a Dog**

**Unconditional love**. Who can't use more of this in her life? A dog will follow you around, find everything you do endlessly fascinating, be up for any activity and — regardless of size — want to sit on your lap, kiss your face, and sleep in your bed.

**Protection**. Since ancient times dogs have served as protection for their masters. Having one whose senses are much more acute than ours to watch over the house and its inhabitants contributes to a feeling of security — and intimidates interlopers.

**Companionship.** Talk to yourself much? With a dog, no one will think you're nuts. With a dog, you're never alone and his presence is a comfort. Dogs don't care how we look, what we wear, or how successful we are. That's why so many people consider a dog their best friend.

**Enforced Exercise.** Hate to exercise? I know I do. Having a dog ensures that you'll get out of the house at least three times a day to take him for a walk to relieve himself. At least one of those walks should be a lengthy one to give both of you the exercise you need.

**Way to Meet New People.** Babies, kids, adults... nearly everyone loves dogs. Whether yours is a mutt or a pedigree, people will want to pet the dog and have questions: What's his name? How old is he? In city parks and dog runs, you'll encounter the same people (and their dogs) if you visit at the same time each day. Suddenly you're part of a pack, too.

**Cons of Getting a Dog**

**Residential restrictions.** If you don't own your home, you may have a landlord who doesn't permit dogs (or only accepts dogs under a certain weight). So know in advance whether dogs are allowed where you live. Once you love a dog, you'll never want to have to choose between having an animal and a home.

**Training.** Unless you adopt an older dog (and so many great ones need homes), you may have to do some training. Puppies, of course, are the most work. And the sooner you can housebreak yours, the happier you'll be. Many local animal shelters offer affordable training courses, and private trainers are also an option if you're not confident or initially successful in training your dog.

**Brown-bagging it.** You'll need to clean up after your dog. It's the law in many municipalities.

**Cost.** In addition to the one-time cost of getting a dog, leash and license, be prepared for recurring costs. There's dog food, of course. And treats. And annual (or more frequent) visits to the vet. Depending on your dog's breed, grooming may be a monthly expense as well.

**Dog hair**. Have a wardrobe that leans toward black? Either get a black dog, start thinking pastels, or keep a lint roller at hand. Note: Dogs with actual hair, rather than fur (such as poodles and cocker spaniels) do not shed; they require grooming.

**Mobility.** Unless you plan to take your dog on vacation, he can put a damper on wanderlust. You'll have to figure out what to do with the dog while you're away. If you don't have a friend or relative to shelter him, you'll have to factor the cost of boarding into your trip's budget.

**They don't live long enough.** The bigger the dog, the shorter the lifespan. But even teacup dogs don't live as long as humans. Chances are, you'll outlive your dog. And it will break your heart. You'll never forget that dog. But he will create a place in your heart big enough for you to love a dog again.